Interview with

STACI DAVIS BASDEN

At Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center

Harkers Island, North Carolina

Photo from Davis Family, Staci with father Wayne Davis in Wayne Davis Decoy Shop, Harkers Island

Interviewed by Eva Leasure on June 25, 2024

Transcribed by Eva Leasure

Down East Change Project

Eva Leasure: Okay, this is Eva Leasure, it is June 25, 2024, and this is the Changes Down East Project. With me today is Staci Davis Basden. And we are at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center on Harkers Island. Okay, so we're just going to start off with more introductory questions—when were you born, where were you born, and where did you grow up?

SDB: Okay. I was born March 25, 1972, and I was born in Morehead City, at the hospital there. And I have lived at Harkers Island for—I grew up on Harkers Island, I moved away when I was 22, when I got married. And then, but we didn't live far, we rented a little bit in Duplin County, because that's where my husband was from. Got a job teaching at East Carteret, so I was able to stay here, so we moved back to Harkers Island, and he worked at the prison in Newport. And then I taught at East Carteret for a while. We moved away twenty-one years ago, again because of a job.

EL: Okay. So who were your parents, where were they from, and what did they do for a living?

SDB: My mother is Lana Hancock Davis from Harkers Island, she was literally born on Harkers Island, in the front room of her home. She was a homemaker, and she was an assistant teacher at the elementary school on Harkers Island. She was an assistant to Miss Ruth Fulcher, who has very recently passed away. She was a third grade teacher. And Mom loved it. But she went to work when I went in kindergarten. And she worked there for a while. A while, not sure how many years. She quit working there when her first grandson was born and she stayed home to keep him. My father is Henry Wayne Davis; he's from Harkers Island as well, but he does clarify that he was born in a hospital. [laughter] But he's lived here pretty much all his life. Their married lives—he was in the Coast Guard, so they moved a little with that. But for the most part they've lived here all their lives, and of course have raised their family here. And he worked with the Electric Company on Harkers Island after he got out of the Coast Guard, and he worked there for forty years and retired. He's still working hard, decoy carving, and has his shop and stuff on the Island.

EL: Wow. Okay, so, you talked about this, about being a teacher. So, can you talk about where you taught and how long you taught at each school?

SDB: Okay. Let's see if I can remember this. I of course attended East Carteret, I was graduated in 1990. I was part of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program at the time, and I went to UNC Chapel Hill. Hated it, not because of Chapel Hill, but because it was not near the water. And that was a shock to me—that was my first encounter with homesickness. So I transferred for my junior and senior years to UNC Wilmington, because my scholarship would transfer. And I was fine. Quit coming home. Met my husband there, and I got a degree in English and certification in secondary high school education. Was fortunate to get a job at East Carteret High School, so, out of college, we got married, I graduated the first of May, we got married the end of May, interviewed, got the job over the summer, and so in August I was teaching at East Carteret. I taught there for nine years, it was actually nine and a half years, but I did one year part-time because I started having kids. And so I did that. And it was really neat, because I taught with my former teachers. So that was really interesting experience. I started having kids as I mentioned, and after my second child, I decided to stay home. So I was going to stay home with them until they started school. 'Cause that's what Mom had done with us and I saw the benefits of that. So I was at home, Darcy was three—well not quite three, at the time, Davis was not quite five. And a former teacher friend of mine, Tom Fraser, was the principal at Pamlico County High School. And my husband at the time—well, he's been my husband a long time, thirty years—but my husband's work force at the time was in Pamlico County, he had transferred and worked at the prison there. And he rode the ferry back and forth. Tom lived in Beaufort, so he also rode the ferry. So Tom found out that Staci was still home with the kids. So Tom started sending messages by Darryl, because he needed an English teacher.

And I would just laugh. Well, then, Tom started calling me. And so after a lot of no's, Tom convinced me that it would be a fun day trip for me to take the kids and ride the ferry and come visit Pamlico County. I had never been to Pamlico County. So I did. I didn't tell Darryl about it, but I had no intentions of taking a job. But I wanted Tom to quit calling, so we went. I took the kids, they thought it was so much fun, a friend of ours was the captain of the ferry, and so he was working that day, Richard Gillikin. And so he, over the intercom, said "Hey Davis and Darcy!" and so invites them up to his quarters and all that. So I'm like, "Great," 'cause they're falling in love with this. And so we go, and we visit, and when I walk into the school, Tom, principal, is there, and Ed Brinson who is the department chair is there. And then a member from the county school board was there. So I walked in, and I was like, "What's happening?" And Tom says, "Nothing, we're just here to visit." Long story short, they ended up showing me the classroom I would have, blah blah blah—I fell in love with it. It felt really nice, and I felt like I knew them a long time.

Well, while I was there Darryl went by on his lunch break and he saw our van in the parking lot. And Darryl, you got to know him to understand he is extremely perceptive from his career, he definitely is always, like, scanning around. So he sees it, he turns around, he comes, "Yep, that's Staci's. What is she doing here?" So we're walking down the hall, getting ready to leave the school and Darryl walks in. And I'm like, "No way." Busted! So then he laughs, Tom explains, and I'm like, "Nope"—I wanted Darcy to be in a certain daycare, 'cause she couldn't get—it was a private one that was there, and they were full. And so Annette looks at—I can't think of her name—Wanda, her name was Wanda. Looked at Wanda, and she said "No problem." And she picked up the phone, called the director of that daycare who used to be an employee, I didn't know that, and says, you know, "We have this going on," and so "No problem, she's in." And so, that was solved. And so I was like, "We have nowhere to live!" And so Annette says, "No problem, I have some realtor friend"—anyway, it was like that. So, by the time we came home we knew that we were going to be moving. We moved and I taught at Pamlico County High School, for only three years. Darcy was there in the daycare, then she was in kindergarten and first grade—no, preschool, two years, kindergarten, Davis was in first, second—kindergarten, first and second grade. He started school there. Anyway, I say all that because the next year Davis was going to be transitioning into the elementary school, Darcy, of course, was entering first grade, and I started seeing how I enjoyed public school teaching, but I started looking at it through a parent's eyes. And the school, the environment, not just Pamlico County, everywhere, was not exactly what I wanted them to be in. So my sister, who had moved away when she got married, years before, to Kinston. She taught at Arendell Parrott Academy. And I knew that that was a very different environment because Tanya and I would talk shop and things that would happen in my classroom or Davis's classroom, you know, as a first grader—it wasn't the same.

So that summer, I put in an application to Arendell Parrott Academy. Not thinking anything would happen, but just in the future so that by the time they got hopefully in middle or high school something would come up. That summer, I got a call from Dr. Ike Sutherland, who was the headmaster at the time, and wanted to have a teacher retire, and wanted to interview me. So I was like, "Okay!" Went for the interview, thought for sure they knew I was Tanya's sister. So I interviewed, talked to them, where I'm from, my experience, they showed me where my classroom would be and I'm like thinking this is deja-vu—like, "What's happening here?" And in my classroom, what would be my classroom, I say to Hugh Pollock, is the one showing me around, and I say, "Well, Tanya is not going to believe this," because across the hall was Tanya's classroom. And he's like, "What? You know Tanya?" And that's my sister. I'm like, "Yes, I know her!" And I was like, "You don't know that we're sisters?" Well his demeanor completely changes, and he's like "We have got to go tell Ike that you're Tanya's sister!" So then I'm thinking, "This is not good," because I'm not like Tanya. Tanya is very reserved, and very mild-mannered, and Tanya was just—she was the peacemaker! She was the second child, she was the peacemaker. And

so I feel very guilty, because I'm not saying anything, and I'm thinking "They think that I'm like Tanya—I'm not like Tanya!" And so he introduces me to Ike as Tanya's sister, Ike's demeanor changes and he gets so excited, and I'm like "Oh my God, what am I gonna do?" And so I still didn't say anything. So, they had to interview a couple more people, they said, "Well, I'll call you in the morning," so I go back to Pamlico County thinking "I just totally misrepresented myself!" [laughter] And so they call me that night, they offered me the position. And so I told Dr. Sutherland on the phone, I was like, "I've got to tell you this!" And so I told him that. I said "You're not getting another Tanya McLaughhorn. I mean, like, she's my sister, but—" And he's like "We don't want another Tanya, but we know who your family is and we know where you come from." And so that was really my second encounter, but the more blatant encounter of "Where you come from matters." That's why I told you all of that. And so, we took the job! Because that meant that Davis and Darcy could be in that environment. And it was a wonderful environment. And so Darcy was there in first grade and Davis started in third, and I'm still there. So I've been there for eighteen years, now. And we went home, put a sign in the yard "For Sale: By Owner," we sold our home and bought a home in Lenoir County in less than three weeks.

EL: Oh my gosh. So it's always fallen into place for you.

SDB: It's always—because I really think that the Lord knows that I'm extremely hard-headed, and I've got to be sure—I jokingly think I'm a risk-taker, but my risks are pretty safe. And so everything falls into place. Same thing with my move to Pamlico County, you know, that was quick, that was over the summer, happened in July and August we were there. But everything fell into place. And same thing with our move to Kinston. I mean, like, yes, it's so crazy, but if you know the whole story, you know that everything has worked out. But yeah! So, that's how I ended up there and I've been teaching now for, eighteen, twenty-one, almost thirty years!

EL: Wow.

SDB: Yeah. My friends have started retiring, but because of my switch from public to private, that set me back some with that so I'm going to be teaching a few more years. But—I've been teaching a long time. But I teach middle school now, at Parrot Academy, I do middle school instead of high school. But it's still English, of course. Yeah. That was a long-winded answer!

EL: I'm glad you gave it! [laughter] No! I am! Because it actually is a good segue into the next question, because this one was talking about moving off the island, but I'd be interested—and this is a question that I'm sure is going to have a long answer, because you can't answer this question in a short way, but—what was it like growing up on Harkers Island? Um, what did you do for fun? You know, where on the island would you spend time, aside from your house?

SDB: Mm-hmm. Wow. Okay. This is funny because my mom always—like, always—jokes with my dad—all of my life I've heard her say this, and she still does this—she'll joke with Dad sometimes and say that Grandma Mary Francis, which is his mom, never knew where he was. Like, had no—she let him do anything, never paid attention, like, never knew where he was. And like, some of the stories where he would—situations he'd get in—Grandma really didn't pay attention to what Daddy was doing. Because he was from the house to the fish house, and he was, you know, doing his thing. Recently, I brought Mama's attention to the fact that she really didn't know where I was either! And she swears that that's not true. But—I started giving her examples, and she's like, "Did I do that?" But see—I was the third child, so—I have two sisters—Dwayna and Tanya, when they were born, Dad was in the Coast Guard. So Mom had them, you know, all—24/7 when Dad was gone. So, when I came around, Dad was out of the Coast Guard, so Mom jokingly—but seriously—said to him, "All right, she's yours. Like, you've got to make up for lost time." So I quickly learned that if I had to get up during the night, if I had a bad dream,

or if I had to use the bathroom or if I wanted a glass of water—I walked to Daddy's side of the bed. 'Cause if I didn't, and I woke up Mama, she would just nudge Daddy. And so Daddy would get up with me during the night. I've always been connected to him. I'm gonna cry! [laughter] And so what I did for fun was follow Daddy around—and I was the closest that he had to a son. And—I would do anything, like he would be working on decoys or building a boat and he would set me—something safe—kinda safe—he would give me a hammer, and whatever to beat and pretend like I was doing that. They moved an old house n our backyard. And I was still little, and he gave me the upstairs. And he transformed that upstairs to a playhouse for me.

EL: Wow.

SDB: So he had two rooms upstairs—windows on the front, windows on the back—so we could raise the windows, the air went through—'cause no AC or anything was there. And it was my classroom—he had set me up a classroom—I had a desk out of the first school house that was here.

EL: Oh my gosh!

SDB: That was my desk—Mama painted it for me, had that, and my cousin Richie—who is now the superintendent of Carteret County Schools—he and I—he was born in February, I was born in March, so we were—we were twins. And so he would be there most of the time and so we had two desks—and we both ended up in education, which is funny. But then, of course the other room I had was the bedroom, and that's where my dolls were, and that's where we had, you know, a sleeping area—had all that stuff. But Daddy did that for me. And so he would be downstairs working, and I would be upstairs playing. So that was—a long, long time. I mean, like, forever-- and my friends would come over, 'cause I had a cool playhouse! And then, later, when I got older, that's when Mom forgets. But we would walk everywhere.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: And so I would call my friend group—which, most, not all of them, but most of them, are still here. Mary Ann, who lives—she lives in Beaufort now, and Johanna, who lives in Newport now. Tracy, she lives in Beaufort now—so now, you're noticing this, I mention it because not a lot of them live *on* the Island, but they're close by. Tara—I don't even know where Tara lives now. But we would—Ellen still lives on the island now, Richard's wife—but we would walk to each other's house. We'd call—"Are you home?" "Yes, I'm home"—and so Johanna would be on the way, and so she was not far, so I'd walk to Johanna's house. And, 'course, at that time, you knew where everybody lived, everybody's house, you knew this was So-and-So's house, this was So-and-So—and so we'd walk through their yards, and they'd see me walking through their yard, and they'd say "Well there's Staci"—you know, you never questioned crossing that boundary into somebody's yard. Not the case now. But we'd walk, and we'd take shortcuts through yards, I'd pick up Johanna. And by pick-up, I say—I'd knock on the door, her mom, Melvina, would say "Jo, Staci's here!" She'd come out. Most of the time she'd come out after Miss Melvina would say "Are you hungry?" "Well of course I'm hungry" so she'd fix you a sandwich, fold it over, you know, bologna sandwich, mustard, and no bottled water, no, we didn't have bottled water, so we would not—we'd have a thermos or nothing, and-- but we would eat on the way. So then we'd walk to Mary Ann's. Now Mary Ann lived a mile and a half—two miles? If you took the shortcut, 'cause she lived in the middle of the Island, so we'd walk from Johanna's to Mary Ann's.

EL: Oh my gosh!

SDB: Didn't think *anything* of it! Mary Ann—we'd stop to her house, her mom was Phyllis, Miss Phyllis had a hair salon in her house. You talk about fun! Because we would hear those ladies talking. So we would hang out at Mary Ann's house for a little while. She had an upstairs bedroom—they had an older

house too, and the upstairs was her bedroom—we'd hang out, we'd eat. Then, we'd go to the sand hole. And the sand hole was further to—near—it was behind Seaside.

EL: So you walked everywhere!

SDB: We walked! And we'd go there and there—friends would be there, and they'd be on four-wheelers and three-wheelers and things. And we'd play—I mean, we would play all day long. We didn't have cell phones—Mama didn't know where I was! And Mom was like, "You did what? I didn't say you could do that!" And I'm like "Mama! Yes, you did! I mean, like, you never, you never questioned anything!" And it's scary now to think about it, 'cause nobody could contact us in any way, but that's what we did! And then when it started getting dusk, when you had better get home, so we would reverse, and we'd come home. Opposite end of the Island, I could give you the same scenario with Janet, who again lived near the road, and then we'd go to Ellen's, who was next, and, you know, David Gaskill, bless him, we've lost him way too soon, but I had the biggest crush on David Gaskill, so we'd always have to go by his house and see Miss Patsy, his mama—we weren't—I mean, I love Miss Patsy, I still stop and see Miss Patsy—but we were hoping David was home.

EL: [laughter]

SDB: I mean, you know, but we walked! We would play games as we walked, we would sing songs, and we would—that's what we did. That's what we did for fun! We played outside! My sisters and I, we would take a stick, and we would draw a house, we would draw a square, and in that square we would make rooms. This would be the kitchen, this area would be the living room, this would be whatever. We'd draw furniture. And we would make, you know, mud pies, and we would do things like that. And we would do that in the kitchen. And then we'd have, you know, our doll babies, they would be in the kitchen. For hours and hours and hours we would do that. We would play roll-the-bat, we'd hit the ball, get it, roll it, I mean—we smelled, the end of summer, we smelled like little dogs

EL: [laughter]

SDB: by the time we got—'cause that's all we did, was stay outside. So, that's—I don't remember the rest of your question, but that was how it was growing up. Dating. This was a funny story, 'cause I hadn't thought about this until recently, I was telling Mama—you know, you date people that live Down East or on the Island, and—there was one in particular, I remember his daddy was a shrimper. And it was about 9:30, 10 o'clock. And we're like, "Let's go get some shrimp! That would be, like, so good!" So we hop in the boat!

EL: [laughter]

SDB: And we went, we knew where his dad was, and we went there, he gave us a mess of shrimp, and we came home, we boiled 'em, cooked 'em, ate 'em—we thought that was normal! It's not normal. But, it was for here. So. What else did you ask me? I don't remember.

EL: You covered a lot of it!

SDB: [laughter]

EL: That was—that was great! No, that was great! I do—now, when you're talking about the house, is this the house that your parents currently live in?

SDB: Mm-mm.

EL: Okay.

SDB: No. That was—the house we lived in was in Bayview Drive.

EL: Okay.

SDB: And it is, of course, it's still there. It's a split-level house, Daddy built that house. We moved into that house when I was a baby. It is on—it had a boat basin, in the back, and Dad's shrimp boats, and all, you know, was docked right in the back yard. And later that same house that we moved there, his mom—he ended up fixing it up and Grandmama lived there for a long time. But yeah, it's still there, and oh, what I would give to live in that house again. But Dad—he built that, and then his neighbor, Bill Guthrie, who has passed now, Miss Betsy—and they built their house next door, and so they were the first. But they—Dad did get that land, I think he had two acres? He bought it from Uncle Earl Davis, who was—Uncle Earl tried to get them to buy some land in Oak Hammock. And they went and looked. But they didn't like how marshy it was.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: And well then, so Uncle Earl said, "Well, I have this land," which is on Bayview Drive, now, and so they were among the first to live on Bayview at the time, but yeah, he bought a couple acres—this may be wrong, but you can ask him, but it was like $50 an acre, it might not even be that much, but it was a lot at the time. And then Dad, like I said, built the house that was there.

EL: That's amazing.

SDB: Mm-hmm.

EL: So was Earl Davis your father's uncle?

SDB: Mm-mm. [laughter]

EL: [laughter]

SDB: Here we go—into the intertwined branches of our family tree!

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: K. Uncle Earl—obviously was a Davis—but he married my—we called her "Big Sister," Lillian. Lillian and my grandmother, my mama's mama, Louise, were sisters.

EL: Okay.

SDB: So, I—and shame on me for not knowing this—I think—I know I was connected that way, I don't think Earl Davis's family was mine. I've never seen those connections, so of course, I could—I might be wrong. But, Big Sister was Granny Louise's sister.

EL: Okay.

SDB: So I actually was connected to Uncle Earl through Mama. Isn't that funny?

EL: That is! That is funny.

SDB: [laughter] Uh-huh.

EL: There's a Davis, but you're not related by blood to the Davis.

SDB: Right. Right.

EL: [laughter]

SDB: Because he's not from here.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: Yep. You know, he—they moved. But yeah. But yeah! That was—he was the one that they got their land from, and such.

EL: Wow.

SDB: Mm-hmm. Yep. And he—Dad told me that—the Oak Hammock, Uncle Earl laid out the plans for Oak Hammock what he had, 'cause at the time, now you know there's the basins in Oak Hammock. But they weren't there. And it was just really marshy. And Uncle Earl told Dad, "So this is what we're gonna do! I'm gonna build, I'm gonna dig basins, I'm gonna use the dirt to make these land—the land, you know, deeper. And fill the land. And so he got three- I think there's three, down there now, or is there two? I can't remember. Two or three. Anyway, he got that far, and then, of course, federal agencies got involved and it's like, "Stop."

EL: [laughter]

SDB: "Like, you can't do this." And so—because it was going to be developed much more than it is now. And so—but that was how—why there are houses down there, it's because of Uncle Earl doing that, and 'course Mom and Daddy didn't want to wait for all that—"What if he don't do it?" And so that's another reason why they chose the bay side.

EL: Was that in the '70s, the development of Oak Hammock?

SDB: Probably, because I was born in '72, and they moved in our house right after I was born. So, maybe late 60s?

EL: Okay.

SDB: Mid- to- late '60s is when this is going on? Of course, Daddy would know for sure, but it had to be before that because they bought the land that we're on and built the house, and you know, I was a baby. I think I was even, not even one yet, when we moved in.

EL: So were there a lot of houses in Bayview at that time, or were they kind of the early ones?

SDB: No. There weren't a lot

EL: Okay.

SDB: there. Un-uh. Again, he would have to tell you, but I know that Mr. Bill and Dad were—they helped each other build. Dad's funny—he said that he—the house plans that were approved were like an FHA house, and he said he went and laid the cinder blocks, slid it out and he said he would step back and he looked at it, and he's like, "This is not what I want." So—and this is my Dad's mind—in his mind he could see—and he had never built a house before, so he totally changed the cinder blocks, changed the layout, went—scratched it, drew it out, and so he showed Bill, said "This is what I'm gonna build." And so he did a split-level house instead—but it made sense to him. And he, without any training, built the house.

EL: And it's a beautiful house.

SDB: It's a beautiful house. Yeah.

EL: That's amazing.

SDB: It's crazy, isn't it? Yep.

EL: You know, I think—it's interesting that you talk about your dad so much and kind of what he knows as—these changes going on that—you know, referring to him—I think, you told me before, that your parents told you that the Harkers Island that they grew up in was very different from the Harkers Island that you grew up in.

SDB: Mm-hmm.

EL: Do you remember what they would say were the big changes?

SDB: I do. When I grew up, 'course there were roads throughout the Island. When Mom and Dad grew up, there wasn't as many, and so they—the landing was still most people's front yards. Now, they were here when roads were here, I'm not saying that. But there wasn't as many—the little nooks and crannies. So, when I grew up, there were—surely—for most of my life the roads have been paved. 'Course they weren't when they were. The beaches! When I grew up, we would go lay out to the shore, to the landing, we would go to the bridge, of course none of those houses were at the bridge when I was a teenager. And the bridge beach was wider. And it went further down, you could go on down. But when Mom and Dad grew up, that kind of beach was all around the Island. I mean like I can't even begin to imagine that. So when I would go to the landing to lay out, it had to be on low tide, even when I was growing up. Now, I mean, if it's high tide, you don't have any shore at all, you know. But that was a big thing--the erosion. That had happened, between—from them to me. And now, it's even worse. The things, like businesses on the Island. I grew up with-- there was a theater here on the Island, which later became an arcade, there were restaurants—oh my goodness! Island Restaurant—I miss that—every time I still go by that piece of land that it used to be, I miss that restaurant. And, you know, we had these things. But they had different kinds of businesses, like they had more fish houses and boat houses and scallop houses. They had started waning some when I was growing up. There wasn't nearly as many as they used to talk about.

And another thing with them—electricity! Dad—they had electricity, but it was minimal. You know, Mom and Dad, when I was growing up, they would constantly, you know, "Turn the light off!" Because they were from the generations that didn't have electricity, and when you did you certainly didn't waste it. So that was foreign to me, it's like "What is the big deal?" You know, you switch lights—I mean, there it is. Telephones, same thing. You know, they were like "Why are you spending--?" 'Cause especially when I was a teenager, we had the rotary phones and such, but my bedroom—you could pull the phone and put the cord under the door and close the door. And so Mama could hear everything, but I felt like I had privacy. She would knock, "Get off the phone!" And she would say so many times, "Why do you stay on the phone so much?" Which is very similar to now—me—"Why are you on the computer so much?" And they never had that! While I think of my childhood as being simple and simplistic, theirs was even more so, because they didn't have as many cars or electronics or televisions, where we did have that. But they still did the hanging out, and the playing outside, so we did still share that. I'm sure I'm missing something! But Mama would say that—again, similar to me, everybody would know who everybody was. And, lot of people—folks would be on the front porches, when Mom and Dad were growing up, and so they kept an eye on each other. And so Mama would say that by the time that you walked by So-and-So's house, I won't say names, but while you walk by So-and-So's house, by the time she got to her house, somehow, Granny knew that Mama had been on that end of the island.

EL: [laughter]

SDB: You know? And that's funny, I mean with us growing up, we'd always swear that if we did something, by the time we got home, Mama would know!

EL: [laughter]

SDB: 'Course ours was with a phone call. So, I mean, there's lots of similarities, but also a whole lot of advancements, a lot of changes, between them and us.

EL: I'd be interested—when you're talking about the erosion on the shoreline—when were all those bulkheads put up? Was that—do you remember that happening?

SDB: I don't remember that happening.

EL: Okay.

SDB: There's one thing that I have realized the older I have gotten, is that when I lived here, on the Island, as most young people—you just take a lot for granted, and you don't really pay attention to what's going on. So, I don't remember that. I do remember there were *some*—like I remember down behind Uncle Earl's house [near Billy's] and stuff, they would start being bulkheaded—at our house, on the bay, Dad had put up bulkheads when he did the boat basin. But I don't know when, I don't know. Daddy would definitely be able to tell you more about that than me. But, I mean, it's crazy. Dad and Mom used to say—'cause we would go, and we would try to go again when it was low tide so that we'd have more beach—but now I do by, and it's like they have hardly none there at the bridge. But we would go, and we would stay all day. And we'd only have to move our chair a little. You know, now they'd be almost in the woods, you know, when the water gets high tide. But Mom and Dad—I mean, they would have triple the beach that we had. And it's just—I can't begin to imagine in my mind that kind of shoreline. But, I mean, we're talking all around. Isn't that crazy?

EL: That is.

SDB: It blows my mind. But, anyway. So, I don't know. I'm not sure about that.

EL: You know, it's interesting—'cause, it—you know, it blows our mind to think about the changes between their generation and your generation, but I know you said that it was huge changes from your generation until, I guess, your kids.

SDB: Mm-hmm.

EL: And them, growing up. So, when you tell them about all the changes that have happened since when you were growing up, you know, what do you tell them?

SDB: Well, I'll tell them stories very similar to what I've told you, and they look at me like I'm an alien! Like, "You just walked around the Island—or rode bikes?" I mean, we did do that, too. For some reason, we'd rather walk. I don't know. And they can't wrap their head around that, because my kids grew up with—yes, playing with friends, and going to friends' houses, but by the time they were teenagers, that's when gaming—like Davis could be in his bedroom, and Riley, his best friend lived in Goldsboro, Davis was in Kinston, and they're playing the same game online against each other. You know, and you hear Davis talking to Riley through his headset and it's like, that is so—what?!

EL: [laughter]

SDB: You know? And both of my kids are very much homebodies. I'm completely the opposite. I love to go, go, go. My husband Darryl loves to go, go, go. But that's because we did that when we were young! I mean, Darryl has similar stories about playing and staying outside all the time. I tried when they were little—especially when we lived on the Island, and all, we'd go on picnics and we'd try to do—but they didn't do it nearly as much—and they *couldn't*! 'Cause by the time I started having kids in '90, let's see. Davis was in '98, and Darcy was in 2000. By then, most of the shoreline had been bought up by non-locals. And you could not just go down to the shore. You couldn't think about walking through somebody's yard unless you asked permission first. And that was really strange. When we lived on the Island, there was a house across the road from us that Daddy knew them, and Daddy, you know, is friends—'cause—Electric Company, he had known him. And so I got Dad to ask them if it was okay with them if I would take the kids to their shore when they weren't home. And of course they said yes! But we had to ask first, you know? And so that—we had the luxury of having that across the road. But not everybody does. And so, because of that, and I see it a whole lot, the kids didn't play in the beach, they didn't play on the shore, they didn't do things nearly like we did because you *couldn't.* Because, when I grew up, I literally would walk through anybody's yard and not think anything of it, if they came outside they'd say "Hey," I'd say "Hey, how's your Mama?" That was normal. Same thing, even more so with Mama and Daddy. Really, they were probably with their aunt and uncle. But, my kids couldn't do that. I wouldn't *dream* of—I wouldn't dream of letting them walk half a mile, let alone the whole extent of the Island. There's no way. And plus, also there was more traffic and stuff at the time, by the time when they—when used to, there wasn't. I mean, there'd be a long stint where we'd be walking or riding bikes on the highway and there was no car that went by, even. And so, it was just very limiting, and it's sad. We'd go to the beach, I took Davis and Darcy, took them a couple of times to the bridge, but then the houses were being built and all and so you had like this little area and so all that changed. Yeah. It's sad. I would keep telling them, "Well, used to, this is how we'd—" and they'd just try to imagine it. And it breaks my heart. Mom and Dad used to say "You'll never know the Harkers Island that we knew," but I thought, "I love the Island that I know," you know? But now I feel the same way about my kids, but Davis and Darcy love Harkers Island! And they want—they'll come back, and they'll visit Mom and Dad a lot and they'll come and stay—but what they experience is *nothing* like what I experienced, because it just can't be.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: I mean, it's not—I mean, I couldn't imagine that now, I mean, going to somebody at 10 o'clock at night, pulling up beside them

EL: [laughter]

SDB: and saying "Hey, we want some shrimp!" I mean like "What?" No. You wouldn't do that. You know? And Davis and Darcy would never—they've never been on a boat at night, you know, they've never got pelted by rain in a boat, so, anyway. Lots of changes. Little things, but they add up.

EL: Yeah.

SDB: You know?

EL: Absolutely. And, you know when you were growing up, were there a lot of people from off on the Island, or non-locals?

SDB: Mm-mm. When I was growing—and that was another thing, too, that's a good point—when Mom and Dad lived here there were hardly any. At all. Next to none. There'd be some military that would come, 'cause Mama would joke and say how handsome they were, 'cause they would come, you know,

in their uniforms on and stuff. But, when I was growing up, the vacationers, we would meet them mostly, truly, at the arcade, and the arcade was where—it was right across from the Fish Hook, where the Fish Hook Restaurant is. It was on that corner, and that's where the theater was. The theater burned, and instead of replacing it after that they—Mr. Jerry put an arcade there. And that was when video games were really starting. So we thought we were—had hit the high life, then. I reminded Mama this too, 'cause she had forgotten this. She would drop us off, drop me and friends off, with five dollars. Each game was a quarter. So we could play twenty games. And we'd go in there, and she'd say "All right, I'll be back to pick you up, say, 8 o'clock." She'd drop us off at six, pick us up at eight, seven—whatever. But it was never too late. But that's where we would cross paths with those who were vacationing. But it wasn't a whole lot of people. It would just be a handful. And so much so that they stood out, and we would say, like "Where you from?" and we would all talk—and coincidentally in Kinston, not long after we moved to Kinston, Davis was playing Little League Baseball. I got talking to a lady, her name was Christie, Christie Davenport now, and when she found out I was from Harkers Island, and she looked familiar, but she started telling me, she used to come down, and she used to stay in Otway, and she would come to the arcade

EL: [laughter]

SDB: And I'm like, "Wait, what's your maiden name?" And so I had met Christie, growing up, at the arcade!

EL: What are the odds? [laughter]

SDB: Isn't that crazy? So we had this instant connection because of that. But, no. I mean, they didn't have summer—as many summer homes, it was very rare, like I can tell you where they were. Like, a handful of homes. But *now*, it's completely different.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: Like, you know, there's—I, not only do I not know who lives where, but my children definitely don't know anybody. It's crazy how it's totally flipped.

EL: Yeah.

SDB: Mm-hmm.

EL: Yeah. And you've covered this before, and this is [laughter] maybe a bit repetitive, but, you know, if you talk about all these big changes that have happened to Harkers Island, do you know, kind of, the sequence in which they happened, and kind of what decade in your lifetime was the biggest influx of change?

SDB: Hmm. That's hard. I don't know. Again, let's think. 'Cause taking so much for granted, I didn't like stop and—'cause you know, you don't notice change really until it's happened. I don't know. I guess I started really noticing things when I was in college because I was away a little bit and when I came home I would notice the changes. If that makes sense. When I lived here, I guess I was so close to everything that I didn't notice the people starting to move in and people starting to move off and rules changing and such. But by the time when I started college, when I'd come back not as often, I started noticing that, and then when four years' time, when I got married and moved back, I started teaching at East Carteret, I started noticing big changes with how parents parented, even. How expectations on the Island were changing. And then, we started having kids just four years later, and that, I mean, by that time, like I said, it would have really changed a lot. So I would say I started noticing things when I was in my late teens, early twenties. But that's—I think that would make sense too because that's when you

really do start noticing—looking outwards more instead of just—it's not, you know, it's not all about me, kind of thing. So, yeah, I've never really thought about it.

EL: And that would be the nineties?

SDB: That would be in the nineties.

EL: Okay.

SDB: Yeah, if I graduated in '90, and we got married in '94. Yeah. So that's when I started noticing it the most. I would have been about twenty, twenty-two.

EL: Wow.

SDB: Mm-hmm.

EL: Actually, I'm gonna—I have a list of questions, but I'm gonna skip ahead, 'cause I think you mentioned this—you know, when you taught at East Carteret, what were your impressions of the Down East students and how, you know, they were different versus the kids you went to school with—to high school with—kind of in terms of, not only job opportunities, but the connection to their heritage, and just the experience of growing up Down East, with how many people lived Down East that were [from] "off" compared, you know, from on, and then, kind of, access to the land and water of Harkers Island and the rate of moving off and the rate attending college and I know I just listed off [laughter] a bunch!

SDB: Oh yeah! Okay! When I started teaching at East Carteret, I really, I knew instantly and I felt a connectedness with the Down East students that were in my classroom. Most of them, I knew somebody who they were kin to, and so I could look at them and say "Well you are So-and-So's" and they would laugh and say "How do you know?" and I was like "Well, I went to school with your uncle," or, you know. And so, that happened a whole lot. The kids were extreme—Down East kids—were extremely respectful, they would have very good manners—"Yes, ma'am," "No, ma'am," "Please" and "Thank you,"—I could look at them—I have a very sarcastic, kind of dry wit about me, especially in the classroom, and they would get it, I could say some localisms that would—they would understand.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: And so that was very helpful. A lot of times, though, they didn't plan on going to college. Like, they didn't, that was not their goal. Their goal would be to graduate, and then fish the waters, most of the guys, that was what they wanted to do, and the girls, a lot of them wanted to be teachers. So that really hadn't changed a whole lot because that was the way it was when I was in school, also.

EL: Okay.

SDB: They—you know, that was the aspirations, and that was, you know. You would have some exceptions, but for the most part, that would be the case. Also, though, I taught the lower-level students, because new teachers—this does not make sense, what I'm about to say, but it's the truth—new teachers get the lower students, because the experienced teachers feel like they have earned the right to teach the higher levels. Which is really backwards, because the higher levels are easier to teach then the lower. And so a lot of times, lower-level students get the short end of there. So, with that being said, that was the students that I taught at East Carteret. And so they didn't have examples of much more than were their aspirations were. Now, I taught, like I said, for about nine years. And over the course of those nine years, I still would see people I knew, kids I knew, I mean, without a doubt, but I also started, you know, couldn't guess as much, like, "Oh, you're from—" This will sound bad, but it's the

truth, when I first started teaching, I'd talk to somebody, I'd meet 'em, I'd say, "Okay, you're from Atlantic"

EL: Mm-hmm

SDB: "You're from Davis," "You're from –" I could tell. "You're from Harkers Island."

EL: Is it from the accent?

SDB: Accent.

EL: Okay.

SDB: It got to the point where I couldn't do that. Because a lot of people who I didn't think were from Down East, they would say "Oh I'm from Sea Level" or "I'm from Atlantic" or "I'm from—" And I'm thinking in my mind, "You are not from there." But it would be because of their accent or their mannerisms. What had happened, starting to happen, of course, was that influx of people moving in. By this time, too, I had started working up the ranks, if you will, and so I still taught—I insisted on keeping some lower-level students, 'cause they're the ones that I enjoyed so much. But I also started teaching higher levels, because the curriculum, you know, is completely different, and I enjoyed that as well! And I started seeing—I'm glad I did that, because I started seeing there that the Down East aspirations were changing, and we started talking more about lawyers, and doctors, and scientists, and so things did start shifting in that way, which I definitely think was a sign of the times, too, 'cause now we're talking that we're in the late 90s, getting to 2000, and things you know, wasn't as in a box.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: You know, and so people felt that they—students started getting more encouraged to go and attend college. There were a lot of times where kids were so excited 'cause they were gonna be the first.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: The first generation to attend college and to get that opportunity. So that was exciting. I mean, it's funny to think about, because I haven't really stopped to think about it like this, but *definitely*, I saw a shift happen. Also saw a shift happen with some of the Down East kids, and I say this still with a fondness for them because, you know, I've taught in other schools, but moved to Pamlico County—they still were the most respectful of public school students that I've ever taught. And I think it was because if they weren't, I could look at them and say, you know, give them that look, and they would recognize what that look meant, at the time. So, anyway. And then they'd apologize

EL: [laughter]

SDB: Yeah. [laughter]

EL: Wow.

SDB: Uh-huh.

EL: So, you know, you said when there were people that said "I'm from Sea Level," but, it was just their parents had moved from—from—

SDB: Wherever.

EL: Okay. I see.

SDB: Yeah, yeah. Different places. That's right.

EL: I see.

SDB: Yep.

EL: So, and you mentioned that, kind of, your graduating class and your, I guess, high school cohort, they were—it was mostly—fishing and teaching, with some exception?

SDB: Yes.

EL: Okay.

SDB: If you—All right. If I look at my group that I hung around, that graduated with me, most of the girls—let me go down the list real quick. I can name six teachers, just out of our group. All girls.

EL: Wow.

SDB: And Ritchie went into teaching. And Sean went into teaching. So that's eight, just right off the top of my head. And I'm sure I could say more. But there were also, in that same group, I mean we had, now looking back, we have an attorney, he lives in Stacy. We have a doctor, he was from Beaufort. Trying to think. We have a chef, he was from Harkers Island, he lives in California now. We have fishermen, we have nurses, that was another field, that if you didn't go into teaching, seems like you went into nursing, I have nurse friends, I have one, two, three, I could say four just thinking real quickly—nurses. So, I mean, very much, that—the military! A lot of them went into the military. Especially the Coast Guard, but some went in some other branches, but a lot of those—again, I could name real quickly five, that went in the Coast Guard. Yeah. But a lot of—*most* of our class, graduating class, did go to college. Most of them. So that's good. The ones that didn't stayed back and went fishing.

EL: But just an accomplished group!

SDB: Oh, yeah, yeah.

EL: Yeah.

SDB: We had a very strong class. And it's funny to stop and think about what everybody's doing. Out of that group of eight teachers, three of them have retired. So jealous!

EL: [laughter]

SDB: [laughter]

EL: It's the final push! [laughter]

SDB: [laughter] Oh my goodness. Oh, yeah. That's funny.

EL: So how many of the Down Easters of your graduating class still live in Down East or, you know, around, in Carteret County, I guess?

SDB: A lot of them. A lot of them live nearby.

EL: But not in Down East?

SDB: But a lot, yeah.

EL: Okay.

SDB: If I were to—*my* core friends.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: Ellen's on the Island, Janet, bless, she's passed away, year before last, but she moved away. She lived in Four Oaks. Tracy, was from—

EL: Janet Brooks?

SDB: Janet Brooks. Yep. Do you—you know Janet.

EL: Yep.

SDB: Yeah. Whole 'nother story. My gracious, did I love her. Tracy was from the Island, she lives in Beaufort. Gina, from the Island, she lives in Morehead. Ritchie lives in Beaufort. Sean, from the Island, he lives in Clayton. Interesting story, side note, I'll tell you sometime, but Sean's daughter, and my son, recently got married.

EL: Oh my gosh, congratulations!

SDB: Yes!

EL: [laughter]

SDB: They met at ECU, 'cause they didn't know each other.

EL: What are the odds?!

SDB: I know.

EL: [laughter]

SDB: And Sean and I grew up less than a half a mile from each other. He was born in January, Ritchie was February, I was March, so we were always together.

EL: Oh my gosh!

SDB: And so when they got married and we had the reception and stuff he came and put his arm around me and he said "Did you *ever dream* that our children would get married?" I was like, "No, but I'm so happy!" So that was fun. Let's see. Donovan's still on the Island. So, a lot of them are still close by.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: A whole lot. In Carteret County, anyway. Going down, or passed away, we've had a right many that have passed. Roland's still Down East. Graduated from Harkers Island, I had—it was either fifteen or sixteen in my class in eighth grade. And every other summer—or every other year, usually summer—we have a reunion, that eighth grade class. And so this is the year that we're gonna be doing it, but we're pushing it to the fall this year. But we attend that, we very rarely go to the East Carteret one.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: But *that* is—that's my family. You know? And so, actually, we're in the process now of planning that. And so that's the only reason I can answer these questions so clearly is 'cause we started that about, we've had one, two—so two, four years ago? Shane, he still lives nearby. William's still here. Rachel, she lives on the Outer Banks. April, she lives in Morehead. So, yeah, most of them, most are still around.

EL: Seems like more like Morehead and Beaufort than on the Island?

SDB: On the Island, out of my friend group, there's not many.

EL: Okay.

SDB: At all. Let me scan the Island real quick. One—well, even if I went to, even the grades, like, near me, one or two above: Ellen, Donovan. There's—there're none, on the Island. And even thinking about my sisters, like, older classes. No.

EL: Are they in some of the other Down East communities?

SDB: Most of them are Beaufort and Morehead.

EL: Okay.

SDB: Jodie, my cousin, dear friend, she's in Atlantic.

EL: Okay.

SDB: So, yeah, there is some of that, but most of them are in Beaufort, Morehead—closer to work, which is what pulled them away—marriage, or work.

EL: Wow.

SDB: Mm-hmm.

EL: So, the—I think the job opportunities were very different from your parents' generation versus yours?

SDB: Mm-hmm! Oh, for sure. Yeah. Most of the folks, if they didn't—when Mom and Dad were growing up—if they did not fish or work on the water, stay at home, open scallops, do whatever—if they didn't do that, then they went in the military, or the men went to Cherry Point. The women were teachers. Some worked in the medical field, too—nurses. But that was pretty much it. When I was growing up, again, like I said, lot—whole lot of teachers, and a lot of nurses, fishing industry, we have—but all the folks that I can think of that—we have bankers. But my friends—bankers, nurses. trying to think what else they'd do for a living, law offices. They all live in Beaufort/Morehead, closer to work. And they're the ones who have stayed. The other ones who have moved out of the county, again, it was work-related, or married. 'Cause like, Lavelle, I mentioned the chef. He has gone where his career has taken him, and he's ended up now, in California. But he was on a cruise ship for a long time, traveling the world. I mean, that's pretty much the way it is. Because there was nothing here. Dad—he'll have to tell you about how he got his job with the Electric Company—it is a *good* story—but it was a fluke. Right time—right place, right time. 'Cause it was very rare to be able to get a job—think about it—a job on Harkers Island, that you could support your family with? They're very few and far between, you know? Except, unless you are a teacher, or in education, or something like that. So, very different. Hadn't thought about it that way, either.

EL: And what are the most, I guess, striking differences for you, between living on Harkers Island and off—and I'm actually interested—like, the differences between Pamlico County, and Carteret County?

SDB: Okay. One thing that I loved about Pamlico County, was it reminded me—and still does—of how Harkers Island, Down East, was twenty years ago.

EL: Okay.

SDB: When I went that first day to visit, I was struck by—I felt like I had gone back in time, because it felt like home, how it used to be.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: And, in Pamlico County, there's one high school for the whole county, there's one elementary school, one primary school, one middle school—for the whole county.

EL: Wow.

SDB: Yep. So, that's a special and very unique experience, because that whole county supports that one school. And so that's a uniqueness, too. But, I never—I can't say never—I very rarely hung out on the went end of Carteret County, anyway.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: So it felt like the same situation, as far as high school was—like, my part of the county, my world, supported East Carteret High School. And so that was very familiar. And still, we went not long ago, we rode through Pamlico County-- we lived in Oriental for a year, a little over a year—and then we moved to Bayboro. And, oh my gosh! It was just like—when we lived to Oriental, I felt like I was back on Harkers Island. And I say that because it was—everything was water, you know, and boating, and it was just amazing. And the friendly people. And then we moved back more inland to Bayboro, and I mean, same thing. They very much came from the same type of background that I had on Harkers Island. So, it wasn't a hard shift at all. But, Harkers Island had changed so much. Now, Pamlico County's changed. A *lot,* since we've been gone for eighteen years. And, I mean now, you have the chain stores that are seeping in and things.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: But it's still not as changed as Harkers Island has, in those eighteen years. Harkers Island is still beautiful, but it doesn't have the same face at all. But Pamlico County still does. But, I could see the changes, but it's just like it's behind—and I say that in a *good* way—behind where the Island is.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: But it's definitely been invaded and being changed—a lot, which is kind of disheartening.

EL: Yeah.

SDB: But, that was my biggest—Darryl and I talked about that a lot when we lived in Pamlico County—how it felt like the Island used to be. And now I think that's why I liked it so much.

EL: And then is Kinston just a whole different place?

SDB: Kinston is *completely* different. Now, the funny thing is, when people, first meeting me, and they find out I'm from Harkers Island, they look at me very perplexed

EL: [laughter]

SDB: They say, "Wait a minute, you left Harkers Island to come to *Kinston*?" You know! And, 'course then, I'm like, "In a round about way, yes." Because a lot of my friends, a lot of people I know, guess what! They have beach houses down in Carteret County! And so, it's so funny to me, because, especially at Parrot Academy, a lot of the families have beach houses, and they'll come to Emerald Isle, or they'll

go to Atlantic Beach, some do have some Down East—I actually had a really good friend, who had—their second home was in Stacy! Which was, like, "What?!" They were on Stacy Loop Road—

EL: Oh, wow.

SDB: And it blew my mind when I found that out. But they loved it! They had discovered, you know, the quaintness of Down East, and I was like, "Yeah, it's a great place!" But it's just funny, because Kinston is, you know—I love the convenience, not gonna lie, if I decide I need something, within less than five minutes, I can leave. We don't live in the city limits, so we live a little bit out, but in less than five minutes I can be to Walmart, or I can be, you know. Wherever.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: So that's nice, 'cause that's not the case living on the Island, by any means. But now, we have Dollar General over here

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: So things are changing there. But, my cousin Jodie, I went to see her last weekend in Atlantic, and I hadn't been that way since last summer. I was struck of how pretty everything was, and the drive, and I was like, "Okay. You need to get gas before you start heading this way, you need to get groceries before you start," you know, things how Harkers Island used to be. There're a lot of times now when people in Kinston, they'll say, "Well, I've got to run home, I've got got to go get groceries, and then I've got to run home and take the groceries, and put them in the—" and I laugh, because I think, when we were little, Mom would take us—we'd have to go to town, which meant to Beaufort or Morehead, to get groceries. Well, that would be a fifteen, twenty minute ride, we'd go to the grocery store, but we did other errands too! And so, then we'd come back—so those groceries survived in the car for a couple of hours! And so, and these people are taking, like, freaking out, you know

EL: [laughter]

SDB: And I'm like, "They'll be okay!" You know? So, I mean, it's just a totally different world.

EL: Do you think the rest of Down East has—is similar to what it was when you were growing up, or has it changed as well?

SDB: It's changing.

EL: Okay.

SDB: When I went last weekend, Jodie and I, we sat in her side yard, on the swing, and we sat out there for about an hour or so, and just enjoyed the outside. But she and I were talking about, you know, I don't know who, she would say, like "I don't know who lives there, I don't know that" you know—and so it's happening down that way, for sure. And it's sad to see it taking over like it is, but things change. And my husband and I, because we're at the age now where we actually have the conversation, "Okay, are we staying here, Kinston, or—'cause he's retired, and of course I'm going to be—not too much longer—are we staying here, or are we moving? And if we move, which way are we gonna move?" He's from Duplin County

EL: Mm-hmm

SDB: So are we moving there?—no, we aren't moving there, but anyway—or are we moving to Carteret County? We can't afford to move to Carteret County! If we were to sell what we have in Lenoir County,

and say we got top-dollar for what we have, we would have to double that to get something equivalent—and I'm *not* exaggerating—in Carteret County. *Double* it!

EL: That's crazy!

SDB: That's insane! And I'm not gonna do that! And I'm not going to sell what I have, and love, 'cause I love our neighborhood, love where we are, I'm fine, except it's in Kinston

EL: Mm-hmm

SDB: That's the down—but I'm not gonna sell it, and then come here and put the same, say, the same investment into—and I don't say this derogatory at all—but into a trailer, mobile home, I'm not gonna do that.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: Or I'm not gonna buy a fixer-upper, and you know? And that's what would happen. 'Cause if we were to sell—our house now, in Lenoir County, say we sold it for—we bought it for, like, a hundred and twenty-five thousand. We've been there sixteen years. If we were to sell it now, for, let's say, two twenty-five.

EL: Mm-hmm. That's crazy.

SDB: What, two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars is not gonna buy us a 1600 square foot, 1800 square foot, two story house on almost half an acre—I mean, it's not going to buy that. And so it is very disheartening.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: Used to, you could look on Harkers Island, expect to pay more, but you could go Down East, anywhere! I mean, 'cause when we first got married, we lived, for a little while, in Otway, on Harkers Island Road, but we did that because little bit price difference, you know, but you could afford! You can't even afford anything in—nothing against Cedar Island, 'cause it's beautiful, but I can't afford anything even to Cedar Island now.

EL: And not Otway, nothing—

SDB: Nothing! No—same thing, same issue. I have some real estate friends, who I tell, every time I see them, "If anything comes on the market, a good deal, or you know what we want—" They laugh. They're like, "Staci, that's not happening."

EL: Wow.

SDB: It's not happening. I mean, so if we were to come, and we wanted something comparable to what we have, it would be three hundred fifty to four hundred thousand dollars.

EL: That's crazy.

SDB: And we know—I mean, that's not going to happen. And Mom and Dad joke, and they'll say—'cause they would love for us to move home—and they're like, "Well, when we die, you know this is yours," and I'm like, "But it's too late!"

EL: I'm sorry. Do you want to take break?

SDB: No, it's fine. It's okay.

EL: I think we can talk about something a bit happier, [laughter] you know, you've been very active with the museum. I think, well there's so many things, but you write the newsletter, which actually, my mom wanted me to tell you that she loves it

SDB: [laughter]

EL: [laughter]

SDB: Thanks!

EL: You created "The Landing" exhibit, you did the Community Night, you're gonna do the podcast, you know, among other projects—you know, to what extent do you think your involvement with the museum and your heritage is influenced by how your parents raised you, and who they are?

SDB: Well, my connection with the museum is unique, and has everything to do with who my parents are, and just as a side note—I love my Mama dearly, and the older I get I'm turning into my Mama, but it seems like I talk about Daddy all the time, because, again, we're just [crossed fingers]

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: Always had this special connection. But, as you know, and you'll learn more, but Dad, on his 45th birthday, started the Core Sound Decoy Guild—Waterfowl—you know what I'm talking about!

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: My mind's going—I'm still thinking about what we were just talking about. They started the guild. And so that—next December is when the show started. And so at our house, that year, my sisters and my mom and my dad were folding T-shirts, and we were putting tickets in stacks and we were doing everything that happens there at the show on a much smaller-scale, but we were the first that handled everything. And, here it is, thirty-seven, what is it? Thirty-seven years or so, thirty-right years later, whatever it is, I'm still helping at the show. I now, thankfully, don't have my hands in everything, but I still help with the tickets. So this museum was a dream of my Dad's. And then things happened, and some hurt broke the bonds, and so the guild and the museum split. And they didn't have anything to do with each other for many, many years. And there was some bad blood there. And I don't know the whole story, but I know a little bit, and Dad has shared a little with me the older I've gotten and so has Karen. So, anyway. I didn't have anything to do with the museum, any of that time. Because my Dad was hurt by the museum, and so I was hurt. Then, I started again seeing changes, I was away, I'd come home. And I started seeing names changing. And I started paying more attention to what the museum was doing and what it was about. I started opening up my mind more to know the full story. And I love Karen. And Daddy had actually—he reached out to Karen, the year before the show started, he went to knock on her door, and he said, "Karen, I need your help." Because Karen did "The Mailboat," and he knew that she could do it, and she could help, and she said "Okay. I'm in." And she jumped all in. And I remember that happening, 'cause she was at our house a lot. So, anyway. Side note: before all of that happened, the split, there was a connection in that my husband and I got married at the museum. We were the first wedding at the museum.

EL: Wow!

SDB: This happened before this museum existed. This was when they had the temporary museum beside the elementary school. And we got married on that front porch of that museum. Daddy walked me down the aisle! It was a very happy time. And then, all this fallout

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: And so, it really hurt to see—not only Daddy's dream, but something that I was so excited about, too, go away. So, anyway. So, backstory. So then, I started talking with Dad. And saying, okay, "When are you going to make the first move?" And at first he's like "Nope. No, I'm not," you know? 'Cause Dad is one—he's very quiet, and he's also a peacemaker, like my sister, but if you hurt him, or somebody he loves, or you cross that line, he's never gonna be mean, he's never gonna be ugly, he's never gonna say anything. *Anything*. It's just done.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: He's done. And that's how it was—he had never said anything ugly, and so we started talking, and he was like, "No, no." Within, next visit, and I broached the topic, and he would talk a little bit more. So, when Karen actually called me, summer before last, a couple years now, she called me because they were in a bind, and they needed some help with the education, and they needed some help with the newsletter. And I knew I couldn't help with all of it, 'cause, you know, I'm living in Kinston, so, I'd be glad to do the newsletter. I'd love to do that, because I love to write, but I also had an ulterior motive. 'Cause my Dad is nearing eighty-two. He'll be eighty-two in August. And I wanted him to see the fruition of his dream. And I didn't want it to happen after he died.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: Hopefully a lot of years from now. But, you know, it seems like we memorialize people once they're gone, and I didn't want that to happen, 'cause that would have just made me mad! [laughter]

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: So, I talked to Karen, when she asked me. And I said, "Okay, but Dad's gonna be my source, he's gonna help me a lot." And she's like, and she's always said this, "*Good. Good*. Please! Let him!" And, one thing has led to another, and Dad has thoroughly enjoyed it, he asks me every single week what is next week's newsletter about. Most of the time I'll say "I have *no* clue!"

EL: [laughter]

SDB: And he'll say "Well, what about?" And he'll give me an idea, most of the time. Or, it'll happen, I'll say, "Well, I was thinking about such-and-such," I'll tell him the topic, I'll say, "Now, *you* think of something related to that." You know. And so it's just been this thing that we've done, for now, over a hundred issues of this newsletter.

EL: Wow!

SDB: Yeah, wow. [laughter] And, also in doing that, other opportunities have come open, and happened with the summer camps like I'm doing now, I get to come to Harkers Island, stay for a week with Mom and Dad, I mean, come on! That's pretty good! [laughter] So that's always a fun time. And then Dad, last fall, he started coming to the museum, I'd bring him out here, we'd walk the Willow Pond, he loves that Willow Pond. Last fall, he asked me, he says "Staci, what do you think about—" And it was his idea, the exhibit. And I said, "I think that that's something that you need to talk to Karen about." And he was like, "No, no, no, no." I was like," Yeah-- I'm not gonna do this." Because I have been that bridge for a while. So he said, "See if she wants to talk to me." And so I called Karen, and Karen, of course, was like "Tell me when and where." And so, I've just been, kind of the liaison. I jumped at my opportunity to put my foot in the door, again, was the newsletter, like I said, back before this gap, we got married at the museum, I volunteered as much as I could help, and I mean, like, this is *early* on.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: We wrote everything down. When I was home, when I stayed home from East Carteret with Davis and Darcy, I weren't working, right? So Karen let me transcribe some things for her, and I'm talking Word Processor city, you know what I mean?

EL: Oh my gosh. Yeah. [laughter]

SDB: Yeah, and then that was *gone*. And so I jumped at the chance to do it, because I didn't have a beef with them. Except for that—it hurt my Dad. You know? And at the same time, Dad—time does heal, and Dad was *fine*. But, he didn't know *how* to fix it. So that was why I've done as much as I have. Totally, and unapologetically, it was to mend that hurt for Daddy. 'Cause, you know, I've said this to Karen, the first time that something was named after Dad—if this hadn't have happened, and Daddy passed, and they named a room or they named something after him, I would be, excuse me, but I would be pissed.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: And it would not be received well.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: Because that should have been done all these years.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: When he was alive. And now, things are happening, and Daddy's *allowing* it to happen. Karen's allowing it to happen. And that exhibit came to be. And it was a *lot* of work. Oh my gosh! It was so much work. But it was *so* much fun, because, I mean, he called me. I'm not talking two or three times a week, two or three times a *day*.

EL: [laughter]

SDB: And say "So I was thinking—" And I'd write it down. "I remember *this*! What about this?" Or "I found a picture!" I mean, constantly something. And then—he didn't see or read any of the verbage. He totally trusted me with that, which was daunting to try to represent his vision.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: But, that is *huge*! And like I told Karen, when we were making it happen, I said, "This has *got* to happen!" Because that guild and the museum should be connected.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: Because *that's* where it started! And this is definitely a step in the right direction. And so, for Daddy to be *willing* to do this, and we just, you know, helped it happen. And him coming and speaking and doing, and I mean, I want to get him to do more! So totally selfish reasons why I've done it, but hopefully it is for a greater cause, which will—not only for my Dad, which was my reason, for the beginning—hopefully, what we'll eventually see happen, is a peace meal

EL: Mm-hmm

SDB: be made here between the guild and the museum, because that needs to happen. It needs to happen. And I know Karen wants to live long enough to see that happen as well. But it's a healing process that a lot of people don't see, they don't know the wound, but it's there. And slowly it's healing. And so that's huge and I think that means a whole lot for this area, for this museum, and for the guild,

even though, you know, they've been short-sighted a little bit. But, yeah. So that's why I do what I do—is to try to do what Daddy didn't know how to do.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: And to just kind of be his mouthpiece and to try to help with that.

EL: And it's beautiful. It meant a lot to people. It *means* a lot to people.

SDB: Yes, yep. I've heard nothing but good things, and Dad, you know, his shop, his says he has a lot of people, you know, stop in. Some workers, or whatever, tell that he's got a shop there so they'll stop 'cause they want to meet him, to talk more about it. And I'm—Karen, she's gonna kill me, 'cause I'm slow—but she's after me to do a brochure to go with it so people can take it.

EL: I love that!

SDB: And so that's what I'm working on this summer along with the podcast thing that we're getting going, but yeah. So I've got it—but it's not—I've got the words, we've had to edit, edit, edit, edit, try to do—but anyways. So that's on the next thing. But again, it's been very rewarding, but I totally did it to start with for very selfish reasons—but I was upfront with Karen, Karen knew. [laughter]

EL: And, well your father's done so much. He really has.

SDB: He really has. He really has. And I try not to ponder too much—or dwell, is a better word—too much on thinking of what he could have done in the twenty years, or however long it's been, 'cause he is a historian, if you went in Captain Henry's Store, the displays and the artifacts that he has—it's a life collection, I mean this exhibit that he's put here now. I mean, he has so much that he can share, an, I just, I try—I can't dwell on that, 'cause that's time that's been wasted—it's gone

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: And so now we can only, you know, do with what we have. But he is special and he deserves to be represented in this museum.

EL: Absolutely.

SDB: Yeah. He'll tell you in a heartbeat that he was the first official member of this museum. And he's proud of it! He's proud of it.

EL: Do you think his efforts, throughout his whole life, really, to preserve Harkers Island history and heritage, do you think that that has had a bearing on your children's connection to their heritage?

SDB: Yes. Yes. Because Davis and Darcy, when we moved, they were young.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: Right, Darcy was three, and Davis was five. So, sad but true, their connection to the Island is *me*, and the connection they feel with Mom and Dad, their short lives, before we moved away. And they are so proud. I mean, they help the museum—I mean, the Decoy Festival, Davis and Darcy are there! First weekend of December, they know not to make any plans. So I help with the ticket sales, and do the gate. Well, they've been here since they were babies with me to do that. They hang out with Papa at the show, I mean, you know, Mammy cooks and we have this routine that we have done for all their lives. Well now, of course, they're old enough to help so Darcy, my daughter, Saturday, Sunday, guess what she's doing? She's counting tickets and counting money. She's my partner now. She could do it without

me, but it's a family affair, and we do it. Davis, well, he used to help with security, manning the door. Darryl was the head of security, my husband. Well now, guess who head of security is?

EL: [laughter]

SDB: It's Davis! So now he gets the people to help and do—so that, they're in! Completely in. And they say "We'll do it as long as Papa is part of it," which, of course, is Daddy. But definitely—their connection to their roots to Harkers Island and Down East is, without a doubt, Mom and Dad and me and the stories we share and now since I have been part of this they are so proud of the museum. The night of the exhibit—we had a Community Night—they couldn't come—Darcy lives and works in Wilmington, Davis lives and works in Clayton—but they called, and they talked to me, and they talked to Daddy beforehand, wished him luck, and just so proud. And we recorded it, and we sent it to 'em, and , you know. It was a big deal. So without a doubt, I mean, that's their connection and their tie. I wish it was deeper and wider

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: But, again, a sign of the times, that's what's happened. I mean, Mom and Dad were immersed in Harkers Island, Down East, that was their whole lives, doing this. I was brought up, immersed in it, and of course went to East Carteret, went to college, married, had moved away. Still have pretty broad connection, but it's not as broad as theirs. Or as deep, even. And then, a byproduct of that is my kids. And each generation, if we're not careful, is going to get more and more shallow, as far as the roots—and, we can't, you know—I would be so devastated if two generations from now, if my great-great-grandkids didn't know about Harkers Island. You know? And that could happen so quickly, if we're not careful.

EL: What do you think needs to happen to prevent that from happening—so that people are connected to their heritage?

SDB: I think that we need to be involved, I know that by me being involved with the museum, talking to Dad and Mom about their memories and their stories, and learning from them! It's like, I've learned so much from that newsletter, I present it in a way that I know this, "Hey, look, she look—" I've learned that right before I've written it! You know? Like the week before

EL: [laughter]

SDB: Is when I learn most of that stuff. And so talking about it, and just making it—which is what the museum is supposed to do –is making history come to life. And to make it real. It's not just words, I mean, here is the proof. And so I think that the more active you are, and the more—it's definitely not something that's going to happen without action. And so without me doing and sharing—I'll call Davis and Darcy and say, "Guess what I'm writing about!" or "Did you know this?" You know? Most of the time—Darcy's twenty, almost twenty-four, Davis is twenty-six, they weren't writing or doing whatever before I called and thinking "What's Mama writing about next week?" They're not doing that! But when I call them, they have that conversation with me, and most of the time, they're like, "That's pretty cool!" Or they'll call Daddy—they've called Papa or Mammy, and asked them for more information, but it's because I started it. I instigated that conversation. And that's what's got to happen, and the locals, all Down East, have got to take ownership of that. And they have got to make that happen. 'Cause if not, you'll wake up and all it takes is one generation, and if you have that gap, it's gonna be hard to fix that. And you're gonna have a lot of outsiders telling our story. And that's not going to be helpful, either. I think that's definitely something I've learned, and regret, that we have that gap that we have in our

relationship with the museum. Because I know I could have helped more. But, I'm helping now. I think that's a [?]

EL: Absolutely. Yeah. Now, what are, kind of, your biggest hopes for the future of Harkers Island and Down East—and I know that you've pretty much covered that, but if there's anything else that you would like to say?

SDB: Well, we can't hope that things will stay like they are, 'cause that's not gonna happen. That's just not a realistic hope. And you also can't hope to go back in time, because that's not gonna happen, either. But, you can hope that the people who move in are willing, and are, what's the word? Feel a responsibility to learn about the area that they're moving, that is more than just Cape Lookout Lighthouse,

EL: Mm-hmm.

SDB: It's more than beautiful water, it's more than a new bridge. Harkers Island, all Down East, is here from an extremely unique happenstance. And they should, and will—this is my hope—that they will take it upon themselves to get to know the people, the locals, instead of coming in a condescending way, and if you get to know the people that also is going to help you fall in love even more with the area, and it's the only way that Down East and the story of Down East is going to continue, because if not, and if we continue—and I've met some of each, I've met folks who have moved here and just really love the area because of the story, and I've met folks who love the area despite of the story. And that's the ones that scare me.

EL: Yep.

SDB: And that's what's going to be the demise of Down East, is if that type of person moves in and takes over. I don't mind people moving in, as long as you take time to get to know where you're moving and who you're living next to.

EL: It's someone's home.

SDB: It's someone's home. That's exactly right. Yep.

EL: Now is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't talked about, or that you want to go back and elaborate on, or, I guess, add to? [laughter]

SDB: I don't think so! I've said a lot! [laughter]

EL: And it's gonna be—it's so valuable. So, thank you so much, I've really enjoyed this—now, before we go, I need you to say something you once said to me before—your first name, your last name before you got married and where you're from.

SDB: Okay. Staci Davis Basden—

EL: Oh, not Basden!

SDB: Oh—oh! My—

EL: Your maiden name.

SDB: Oh.

EL: And where you're from. 'Cause I think it's pretty funny.

SDB: Oh! Oh, oh! My whole—my—okay! I'm Staci Davis from Harkers Island.

EL: There we go!

SDB: Yeah!

EL: [laughter]

SDB: So we can't say that I love one more than the other.

EL: [laughter]

SDB: Staci Davis from Harkers Island. That's me!

EL: Thank you so much!

SDB: [laughter]